

<< This section is a recap of the prior two weeks done in “Beat-poet” style. Bass groove a-la “Cool Like That” (Rebirth of Slick, Digable Planets) and bongo accompaniment. >>

*There’s an image problem in this Christian **generation**.  
Christians seen as people in **relations**...with just themselves.*

*It’s like we’ve built our own **aquarium**.  
A safe place for **our** kids and **our** friends to **run**.  
“Instead of fishers of **men**, we’ve become **keepers** of the **aquarium**.”*

*People paint us with words like:  
judgmental, homophobic, sheltered, political, haters, intolerant, unloving, ungrace-filled, uncool.*

*Disturbing stats: the longer we live the Christian **life**,  
the farther we get from people who need the **light!***

*Our world is dying to see authenticity that’s truly Jesus-**inspired**.  
But too often sees Christians as people, not helping—too **tired**.*

*We create, then crawl inside our Christian **bubble**.  
Then wonder why there’s all the filth & mess of a world in **trouble**.*

*Christian: mints, fish, shirts, bumper stickers tell the world where we **stand**.  
But our neighbor: the single mom, the homosexual, the democrat, the divorcee —are just looking for  
an authentic **loving hand**.*

*We know words like: “back sliding,” “prayer warrior,” “traveling mercies” and “fellowship.”  
But can we relate with the words that **epitomize** the struggles of the unbelievers in our **lives**?*

*Jesus...never wrote a book...wasn’t political...  
Jesus was relational...inspirational...multigenerational...humbly sensational...relational.*

*Jesus died. Nailed to a cross---so we could be salt and light to the world.  
It’s to our imperfect **unbelieving neighbor** that our love needs to be...  
(**stop music**) ...unfurled.*

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I want to start with a misconception that’s prevalent in Christianity:

Christians should be separated, apart from the world. There is this dogma in the Church that Christians—these people who have the all-powerful Holy Spirit of God, IN THEM—should have to be careful, and *afraid* of being around people who don’t know God.

And there’s even a Scripture verse for this. Maybe you’ve seen it:

Therefore, come out from among unbelievers,  
and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD.  
Don’t touch their filthy things,  
and I will welcome you.

2 Corinthians 6:17 nlt

Wow—there it is—our proof text for living in the cocoon of all-things-Christian.

Not exactly. This is a specific situation where God's people were slipping back into paganism and worshiping idols. Paul was primarily talking about marriages between Christians and Pagans, in this verse.

“Pagans”—Christian marrying a Pagan—what's the problem?

Pagans were people who typically worshiped many Gods and sometimes their worship even included perverse sexuality. That's why God said, “Separate yourselves from them.”

In other words, this is Scripture written to a specific situation.

(And this is why it's so important, when we're looking at or listening to someone talk about a Scripture verse, that we read the sections before and after it. That's called reading it “in context.”)

I'm starting here today—because I think we've all heard this kind of Christian dogma—backed up by this Scripture—that we should be separated from the culture.

My purpose today is to say as plainly and as biblically as I can:

***That's not true.***

Truth is we need to be IN Christ *and* IN the lives of people who don't know Christ.

So let's look at some context for that. Let's look at Jesus' life and the whole of Scripture and see what it says.

We'll start with Jesus. The Gospels (first 4 books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) chronicle the life of Jesus.

In those books, we see Jesus on occasion teaching in the Jewish Temple or Synagogue. But more often, we find Jesus, meeting people where they are.

In Mark 1:16-20, Jesus was *out and about* walking on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He finds two sets of brothers:

Peter & Andrew

James and John.

While they were fishing, Jesus called them to be fishers of men.

***Jesus meets people where they are.***

In John 1:43, Jesus happens upon Philip east of the Jordan River and asks him to be an apostle.

***Jesus meets people where they are.***

In Mark 1:30-31, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law at her house. (aside: He may have done it for his own self interest since she got out of bed to make them dinner. Jesus—“typical man”—can't even make himself a sandwich ☺...)

Let's look at Matthew 9:9-13. Great insight for meeting people where they are.

(Matt 9:9 nlt)

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.

Timeout: "Tax collector." What's the big deal? Sounds like a nice white collar job, sounds respectable...

The Jews were an "occupied" people. Rome was a super-power that was forcibly in control.

The Romans forced the Jews to pay taxes to Caesar. These Jewish "tax collectors" were allowed to extort more money, over & above the tax from their own people to make themselves wealthy.

This would be like when Germany invaded France in WWII and having a Frenchman collecting taxes for Hitler and gouging his fellow Frenchman for more money for himself.

So "tax collectors" represent the lowest rung of Jewish society when Jesus was around. (Matt 9:10-11 nlt)

Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners.

But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?"

Ok, welcome to the REVOLUTION: Jesus—right here-- is defining how this new face of Christianity looks. He's showing us the difference between the Jews and this new Christianity.

Up to this point, the Jews were all about being "set apart"-- the Holy Huddle, The Jewish Bubble, whatever you want to call it.

There was ONE way to become a Jew—have Jewish parents—"OY!" ☺

This idea that you could influence anyone to be adopted into the faith was revolutionary! And to the Jews, HERESY!

(caution: heavy statement coming up.)

***Right now, in our day-- when we see this protectionist, set apart, Christian Bubble playing out in our culture, it looks more like the Jews that killed Jesus than the faith that Christ gave His life for.***

( Matt 9:12-13 nlt) ("\*Why does your teacher eat with such scum?")

When Jesus heard this\*, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call *not* those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

Jesus thought more about sincerely loving lost people than he did about his reputation. And it did give him a bad reputation—but only with "Church People." (Jews).

Check it out:

And I, the Son of Man, feast and drink, and you say, "He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of the worst of sinners!" But wisdom is shown to be right by what results from it.

Jesus' words Matthew 11:19

And just to be clear, in this room—we too are the worst of sinners. We were, are, or will be: liars, adulterers, pornographers, abusers, gossipers, addicts, felons, idol worshipers, blasphemers, dishonor-ers of parents, thieves and who knows what else.

And on our worst day, Jesus would hang out with us, in spite of the fact that it would damage His reputation.

Jesus didn't and doesn't withhold love until people come to Him. He meets and loves people where they are.

As I look at the whole of Jesus' life through the Gospels, I see a Man who just saw *one world*.

In other words, it didn't matter where he was: at the synagogue, along the shore, in a house, on a road, at the market, at a wedding...He is meeting people where they are and loving them.

Follow me here: Jesus saw one earthly world. But I think we are guilty of see two worlds all the time: Secular. Christian.

We are consciously and unconsciously categorizing everything we see, hear, touch, taste into "secular" or "Christian" sorting bins. And this is a problem. WHY??

Because everything and every person we put into the "secular" bin, we do so with a bit of disdain. With a bit of judgment.

And seeing the world as "secular" and "Christian" is very Jewish of us.

Jesus, seeing ONE world and interacting in it bugged the snot out of the Pharisees:

*"Why are you hanging out with the scummy sinning people in the "secular box", Jesus?!" "You need to be here—in our 'clean' Jewish box."*

Seeing two worlds means we're always judging—sorting things into one pile or the other. And that leads to finger-pointing:

*"Look, he's a homosexual, he's over there."*

*"Those Steinbeck books are "BAD"—they have unchristian words in them. They go over there. We just need "good" books here."*

#### **TIMEOUT:**

I do not want to say that everything and everyone in the world is just "all-good." Welcome to the gray area of our faith this talk.

I think the reason we like to sort things into Christian and secular is we like everything to be simple. *"Just make me list, show me what's good & bad—I like simple."*

They tried that in the Old testament & it was a colossal failure.

Here's our caution:

As we meet people where they are, **Christ followers must "discern" what's appropriate.** (Because everything isn't a case of right and wrong—right & wrong leads you to the "two world" Jewish paradigm.)

Is Steinbeck a “bad” author? I don’t think so. I also wouldn’t have read it to my kids when they were little. The question is: “What’s appropriate?”

As an example, a person new to the faith who has recently battled alcoholism probably shouldn’t choose a bar as a place to meet people where they are.

We have to be appropriate and wise.

Look at the Apostle Peter’s warning to us:

Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.

1 Peter 2:11-12 nlt

Again, this shore’s up our case that we are to be “in the midst” of “among” unbelievers, rather than “set apart.”

This week I was looking at this verse that Mark introduced in week 1:

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:19 niv

That got me thinking...*How* do you fish?

Do you put together a program, or organize a marketing plan so that fish will come to you and then impale themselves on your stringer?

Do you have a cool strategy session where you come up with this great idea of renting space on a series of little underwater billboards---that shows the fish how to get to where you are---

and then how much fun it will be to jump into the arms of a human wearing a vest covered in lethal hooks?

Do you send aqua-mailers to schools of fish...(ok, enough already ☺)

NO! You *go where the fish are*.

You get in the boat and *go*.

You put on some hip waders and then fall clumsily on a moss covered rock.

You go to the lake, river, creek etc.

Fishing is GOING. It’s getting close to the fish.

Fishing isn’t WAITING (here in the church!) FOR THE FISH TO ARRIVE.

Fishing is meeting people where they are!

I couldn’t find one place in the Gospels where Jesus was trying to get someone to church. But there are lots of examples of him getting relationally close with people who didn’t know God. Jesus went where the fish were.

And now we have to turn an important corner:

After you meet people where they are: **just love them...**

Welcome to the organic part of our service. Cause there's no recipe for loving people.

We as Christians have perhaps forgotten how to love people apart from trying to convert them.

You know like—loving people *even if* they never come to church or get saved. Loving them just for the sake of loving them.

People who don't know Christ, are not projects. They're people.

People who don't know Christ, aren't our Christian duty or responsibility. They need to be our friends.

People who don't know Christ usually aren't looking for "One more person to explain it to them." They're looking for authentic love. They're looking to see if we'll love them for who they are, or will we stop loving them if they don't go to church with us. They're looking to see something in us that can't be explained.

I think the Church has unintentionally made fishing for people a **project**. But when I read the Gospels I think for Jesus, fishing was a **lifestyle**.

Projects are intentional. There are goals. There are timelines. It happens in certain places.

But lifestyle is organic. It's a unique expression of how God created you. It's something we take with us wherever we go. It's not confined to a place.

If we're growing impatient because our friend doesn't know Christ yet, our focus is off.

When, *if ever*, our friend comes to Christ is ultimately up to them and God. We are not the *converters*. We are not the *changers*. God is.

Our responsibility is get to a place where we can allow God to love us radically. And then, love Him back.

And then, unselfishly, unconditionally share that love that comes from Christ---with people.

Not as projects. Not with timelines.

But unconditionally, unselfishly sharing Christ's love with everyone.

And guess what? There's no 3 step process for this.

It's organic.

It's an extension of how God created you to be.

It's something that is uniquely you.

You are not the changer. God is.

And it starts with allowing God to change us.

(If you are having trouble loving people...Here's a question: Have you allowed this compassionate God to love YOU?)

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Sandra and I stumbled into something this year that I'd like to share with you. That's really about meeting people where they are.

Back in March we started doing this thing at our house and it's called **The Brick**.  
<http://kokomobrick.com/>

A year ago Sandra started making pizza every Friday night. Initially the kids and I were less than excited about "Pizza Night." Undeterred by our lack luster response, Sandra began tweaking her pizza, little by little, week to week, until we started saying, "*Wow...this is better than take-out pizza...seriously--this is great!*"

Eating her super-incredible pies in the context of watching shows like "[Diners, Drive-thrus & Dives](#)," made me think that Kokomo doesn't have a non-chain "best-pizza-in-town" kind of a place. And perhaps that place, for now, is our home. And maybe we should just start serving great free pizza to good friends and people we want to know better and see what comes of it.

Next thing I know, Sandra is on FaceBook creating an event called "The Brick" and inviting people to it.

First week, 11 people show up.

Second week, 21 people show up. (It's starting to get Facebook buzz...)

Third week, 31 people show up.

Couple weeks later, 50 people show up!

(It's organic...people invite friends...)

(explain the pace—wait for pizza)

Why "The Brick?" First, it's a throwback to one of our favorites series' of all time: [Northern Exposure](#). In its quirky artsy Alaskan town, The Brick was the local restaurant where everyone hung out, shared lightly or talked deeply. Secondly it's the signature of how Sandra makes her crazy-good pies: on stones (or a "brick").

Here are some "Brick Pics":

<http://morganyoung.shutterfly.com/1525>

<http://morganyoung.shutterfly.com/872>

<http://morganyoung.shutterfly.com/729>

All kinds of people show up: old friends, new friends, old church friends, new church friends, and "church not-so-much" friends.

This thing kind of threw us for a loop. We live in this day & age where everyone's busy and over-scheduled, but yet people come.

People new to Oakbrook come and meet some people, then on Sunday, they're like, "Hey I know you!"

And we've noticed that there's not a lot of public space where you can have great food, drink whatever you want, meet some great new people and just relax and "be."

And a great thing that's going on—not because we orchestrated it---is that people who don't really like church, won't come to church—will come and gladly hangout and talk with people who are Christ followers for hours.

We are watching relationships get birthed in our kitchen and front porch, between my church friends, & our “church-not-so-much” friends.

But listen--- there's no agenda. The Brick isn't a Christian-convert-incubator. It's a place for people—all kinds of people—to talk and get to know each other more than small talk.

God has blessed Sandra and I with so many great friends—we're just making a space for them to run into each other—in a “one world” experience—it's not “Christians & unbelievers.” It's just PEOPLE.

It's kind of like the party Matthew threw.

Before I said that meeting people where they are is natural and organic. As weird as it sounds, having 40-50 people in our house is natural. We both have restaurant backgrounds...

Sandra rocks—kicked out 10 pizzas in a kitchen-full of people...

So Sandra & I have clumsily and thankfully fallen into a way to meet people where they are. Regardless of who we meet or run into, we can easily ask them to come over for the best pizza in Kokomo at the next Brick.

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So for you...how is it that you meet people where they are? What's natural for you?

To live like Jesus, is to live a “one world” lifestyle of loving people where they are and *not* seeing the world through the sorting bins of “Christian” & “secular.”

(Setup worship—have people stand ) These are Jesus' command to us:

I have given them Your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I'm *not asking you to take them out of the world*, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by Your truth; teach them Your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, *I am sending them into the world*. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by Your truth.

I am praying not only for these disciples but also for *all who will ever believe in me* through their message.  
John 17:14-20 nlt

(worship set)